

## **Country Report on Holocaust Education in Task Force Member Countries**

### **FRANCE**

**Date of Issue: June 2006**

**Full report following the question guideline:**

**1. What official directives from government ministries and/or local authorities regarding the teaching of the Holocaust exist in your country? Please attach these directives to your answer.**

History studies are not optional in France. It is a full-time subject in the various grades. Holocaust studies are part of the national programme for pupils 10–11, 15, and 17–18 years of age in the part of the curriculum concerning World War II.

The history programme for pupils 10–11 years of age is composed of several topics, among them “The Extermination of the Jews by the Nazis: A Crime against Humanity”.

For students 15 years of age, six to seven hours of lessons about World War II are recommended, mainly Nazi Europe, collaboration and resistance in Vichy France, and the extermination of Jews and Gypsies (Roma).

For students 17 to 18 years of age, about 12 hours are recommended, concerning totalitarianism and World War II. The Holocaust is taught three times: when teaching the Nazi ideology, the Vichy regime, and the Nazi extermination in Europe.

Holocaust studies appear again during the last year of high school with a global summary of World War II.

**2. If the Holocaust is not a mandatory subject, what percentage of schools chooses to teach about the Holocaust?**

Holocaust studies are taught in all schools and for all pupils up to the age of 16. All pupils attending high school until the age of 18 study the Holocaust again at the age of 17–18.

**3. How is the Holocaust defined?**

The Holocaust is defined as a policy of discrimination and systematic extermination of the Jews between 1938/1941 and 1945. In French, most teachers use the Hebrew expression *Shoah* rather than *Holocaust*, to point out the specificity of the Jewish genocide. Massacres of other victims of the Nazis (Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, communists, Slavic peoples) are mentioned as well.

**4. Is the Holocaust taught as a subject in its own right, or as part of a broader topic? Explain the reasoning behind this decision.**

The Holocaust is a specific subject, but it is taught in wider historical perspectives (World War II, the totalitarian regimes, etc.).

**5. At what age(s) do young people learn about the Holocaust in schools? Do students encounter the Holocaust in schools more than once? Please give details.**

Young students are taught about the Holocaust at the age of 10–11, 15, and 17–18. Apart from history classes, the subject might be taught during literature or German lessons for students 14–15 or 17–18 years of age.

**6. How many hours are allocated to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in schools?**

The average time spent on Holocaust studies is one or two hours at each level, in the field of history. It could be much more during other courses (literature, German, music, etc.).

**7. In what areas of study (history, literature, sociology, theology) is the Holocaust taught? In each case, briefly outline the rationale for teaching the Holocaust in this particular subject area.**

Between 2001 and 2003, Primo Levi's writing was an optional subject in literature studies for students age 17 and for the *baccalauréat*. If chosen, it frequently meant more than 20 hours of lessons. Since 2003, Primo Levi is less studied, because it was replaced by an elective on autobiographies. Nevertheless, many teachers choose his writings for this elective as well. The Holocaust is also studied during German classes (daily life in Nazi Germany), music classes (Terezín and so-called degenerate Jewish music), or philosophy classes (Arendt, Adorno, and the question of the memory).

**8. (a) What historical, pedagogical and didactic training is provided to teachers of the Holocaust at either the university level or the professional development level in your country? (b) How many teacher-training sessions are held each year, and how many teachers are involved? (c) What funding is available for training in the teaching of the Holocaust in your country?**

There are no Holocaust studies in French universities. The subject is only mentioned during general lessons on World War II, Nazi Germany, or the Vichy regime. There are plenty of articles and books in French concerning this period in history, but future teachers do not necessarily get academic courses about the Holocaust. There are some specific courses given by nonacademic professors (from nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]), in particular at the CDJC-Memorial de la Shoah, Institut d'Etudes Politiques (IEP – Sciences Po), Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), etc.

**9. Has your country instituted a national Holocaust Memorial Day? If so, in which ways is this day marked and commemorated? What difficulties have you encountered in establishing this day of remembrance in the national consciousness?**

There are several commemoration days for the Holocaust. January 27 has become an important date to celebrate the memory of the Holocaust and the crimes against humanity. The government encourages teachers to mark the event in their classes. Many of them follow this recommendation.

Some special classes are also given in April for the celebration of the Warsaw ghetto uprising and in May for Yom Ha'Shoah or the celebration of the ending of the fighting in Europe.

Since 1995, several public ceremonies are organised in Paris and in the main cities of France on July 16 and 17 for the remembrance of the "Vélodrome d'Hiver rafle [round-up]" and to honor the Brave among the Nation.

**10. Has your country established a national Holocaust memorial and/or museum? What numbers of students visit this memorial/museum each year?**

There is no national Holocaust museum in France, but the Holocaust is mentioned in many city museums specialising in World War II or the Resistance, for instance in Besançon, Grenoble, Caen, and Lyon. In Paris, the CDJC-Memorial de la Shoah is still an NGO but receives funds from many institutions: government, Région Ile-de-France, Ville de Paris, etc. The CDJC-Memorial de la Shoah was visited by more than 5,000 students.

**11. Please estimate the percentage of students in your country who visit authentic sites, and list three primary sources of funding available in your country for visits to authentic sites.**

One might estimate that less than 5 percent of the students have visited at least one authentic site (Drancy, Struthof, les Milles, Izieu, etc.). Travel is also organized to different concentration camps and to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah (FMS), the regions, and the cities together provide more than 50 percent of the funding needed.

**12. What are the three major textbooks used in teaching the Holocaust in your country? How many pages do your school textbooks allocate to the Holocaust, and on which aspects do they focus?**

History handbooks used in schools contain important chapters dealing with the Holocaust for the 4th–5th grades, for 9th grade, and 11th–12th grades. The number of pages differs from one book to another. Two to six pages are written in general in these books, although some larger chapters. Most of the time, the book deals with the anti-Jewish policy in France, the hidden children during the war, and the responsibility of the Vichy regime for the arrests and the deportations. Some aspects of the concentration camps are also dealt with for which teachers often use other documents that they have gathered (maps, statistics, etc.) from other books.

**13. What strategies of differentiation are typically used to make the study of the Holocaust accessible to students of different ages and with different learning needs?**

Teachers obviously adapt their classes to the different psychological development levels and different ages of their students. For the younger pupils, they insist mainly on the difficulties of daily life and the discriminatory measures, concerning children for example. When students are old enough, they are taught about the deportation, the concentration camp universe, and the extermination process. In high school, many teachers use testimonies of survivors coming back from the camps to illustrate their classes.

**14. How far and in what ways is your country's own national history integrated into the teaching of the Holocaust?**

In the past 20 years, teaching of the Holocaust has become an integral part of programmes concerning World War II and the repressive aspect of the Vichy regime. The role of French government in the anti-Jewish policy is clearly stated, particularly concerning the big raids of the summer of 1942 and the conditions in which the deportations took place with the active support of French authorities.

**15. What are the three major obstacles to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in your country?**

There is currently no major obstacle to Holocaust teaching in France, but three major difficulties must be pointed out:

- The lack of time for teaching this subject when teachers have difficulties in finishing a wide programme in the 9th and the 11th–12th grades.
- The opposition and/or the rejection of a minority of students, mainly Muslim ones in some suburbs, of a class specifically on the Jews and the Holocaust.
- The lack of real academic classes given to future teachers and to more experimented ones.